

An interview with Raymond K. Turner

RAYMOND K. TURNER

An Interview Conducted by

Frances Hughes

December 23, 1980

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# NARRATOR DATA SHEET

12-23-80

DATE

Name of narrator: Raymond K. Turner

Address: 1025 Hulman St., Terre Haute, IN Phone: 235-1259

Birthdate: 12-15-16 Birthplace: Vigo County, Indiana

Length of residence in Terre Haute: 64 yrs.

Education: High school.

Occupational history: Bus business since finishing high school  
in 1935 except during World War II.

Special interests, activities, etc. \_\_\_\_\_

Major subject(s) of interview: Turner Coach Co., clientele

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## Interviewing sessions:

<u>Date</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Interviewer</u>
12/23/80	1:30 P.M.	Vigo County Public Library Conference Room	Frances Hughes

Josephine Turner Meister, sister of the narrator, also contributed to the interview.

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RAYMOND K. TURNER  
with Josephine Turner Meister (his sister)  
Tape 1  
December 23, 1980  
In Conference Room of Vigo County Public Library  
INTERVIEWER: Frances Hughes with Darlene Norman  
TRANSCRIBER: Kathleen Skelly  
For: Vigo County Oral History Program  
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FH: This interview is for the Oral History Program of the Wabash Valley Press Club and the Vigo County Public Library. I'm Frances Hughes. I am interviewing Ray Turner of the Turner Coach Company at 1:30 p.m., Tuesday, December 23, 1980, at the Vigo County Public Library. We will be talking about the history of his family's bus company and of transportation in Terre Haute and the surrounding area.

Mr. Turner, your father founded the first local bus company serving the surrounding area, didn't he?

TURNER: Well, I'm not so certain it's the first, but he was in the first year of it.

FH: How did he happen to start the business?

TURNER: Well, I presume he must have just thought there was a need for bus transportation.

FH: When did he start it?

TURNER: He started it in 1921.

FH: What was the . . . was it called the Turner Coach Company then?

TURNER: No, it was called the Wabash Valley Bus Lines then.

FH: What make of bus did he first purchase?

TURNER: I think his first two were Reo chassis, and the Giffel Body Company here in Terre Haute made the bodies for them.

FH: How many did he have?

TURNER: He had two of them to start with.

FH: Do you know what color they were?

TURNER: No, I can't tell you. They were probably blue and white, but I wouldn't want to be positive on that.

FH: How many passengers did each carry?

TURNER: Well, I would be guessing, but I'm going to say 19 or 20 passengers.

FH: What towns did they service and what routes did they take?

TURNER: I think the first line that he started was between Terre Haute and Marshall, Illinois. And that was just as far as he went to start with. And he finally extended on over to Casey and then on into Effingham in later years on the same . . . which was the original route.

FH: That was just the one route then?

TURNER: Right. From Terre Haute to Effingham originally. The original route was just to Marshall. Then they extended it on later.

FH: Now, this was with these two buses?

TURNER: Well, no. They came later with later equipment. The roads were still not much force then. Mostly gravel road then in those days.

FH: There was just one bus then?

TURNER: Well, no. He started out with the two buses, but he only was running to Marshall, Illinois, originally . . . to start with.

FH: And then when he went on farther, he had to have more buses?

TURNER: He had to have more buses in later years, right.

FH: And then, were the drivers then members of the family?

TURNER: Well, no. No, they weren't. They weren't. One driver is still living here in Terre Haute . . . that started with us. He was the second man they ever hired.

FH: What was his name?

TURNER: His name was Carl Jeffers.

FH: And your father drove the other bus?

TURNER: Right. Yes, my dad drove it.

FH: Have you any idea what the bus drivers were paid then?

TURNER: Well, I'm going to say they were probably paid . . . around \$2 a day would be the most. It's quite a difference than today, but . . .

FH: You're all in the family today, but when you pay a bus driver . . . do you mind saying what rate of pay he gets now?

TURNER: Well, it doesn't compare with your big corporations. But they're not starving, as far as that goes. Our pay is . . . we can't pay the big mileage rates the way the big companies do.

FH: What kind of license did they have to have? Did they have to have a license originally?

TURNER: Back then, I don't think they even had to have a license to drive the bus. You had to have a license on the bus but not to drive one of them, I don't think.

FH: Now, as you children reached the age to drive you all started working for the bus company, didn't you?

TURNER: Right, the four of us -- four boys of us.

FH: And what were their names?

TURNER: Well, I'm Ray and then [there was] my brother Hubert and Bob and David.

FH: And then you have a sister who's in the business?

TURNER: Right. I have a sister who takes care of the office work.

FH: And her name?

TURNER: Is Josephine Meister.

FH: And how long have you worked for the company?  
You're semi-retired now, I understand.

TURNER: Well, I started driving on the 19th of August,  
1935 -- the same summer I got out of high school.

FH: Was the Greyhound Line in operation when your  
father started the company?

TURNER: Yes, but [it was] not the corporation that it is  
today. There was a Greyhound Line, but it wasn't . . .  
it wasn't the same setup it is today; it was part of  
it.

FH: But it served some of the smaller towns around  
here, didn't it?

TURNER: Right. Yes, it did.

FH: But not the ones that your father started to  
serve?

TURNER: No, at that time I don't think Greyhound went  
through here going west that way.

FH: Well, now as it expanded, it covered other towns,  
didn't it?

TURNER: Yes.

FH: Do you remember what those routes were?

TURNER: Well, he started . . . he went from Terre Haute  
to Evansville by way of Farmersburg, Sullivan,  
Vincennes, Princeton, and in to Evansville. They  
formed a Wabash Valley Coach Company then.

FH: And that was one route?

TURNER: That was one.

FH: Then what were the others?

TURNER: And in the early years, he went from Terre Haute  
over through Jasonville and Linton. And then later  
on we picked up other routes after World War II  
was over.

FH: And you kept adding to the equipment.

TURNER: Right. That's right.

FH: What kind of transportation was there to nearby towns before your father started that company . . . or to these towns that he covered?

TURNER: Well, there was . . . to Marshall, Illinois, and that way there was nothing but the railroad. But now, going south towards Sullivan, there was the old interurbans run down as far as Sullivan, but . . . of course, there was trains down there then, too -- local trains.

FH: When he first started the company, the roads were either gravel or just mud, weren't they?

TURNER: That's right. Just dirt and gravel, mostly gravel road.

FH: What happened if your bus broke down?

TURNER: Well, if you broke down, you just . . . if you didn't get in at a certain time, somebody went out looking for you. That's about what it amounted to. You would call if you could find a house that had a telephone, which was few and far between.

FH: Were you sort of your own mechanic? Did you know something about the mechanical part of the bus?

TURNER: Well, you had to know a little bit about it. Sometimes you might have to take a pair of pliers and cut a man's fence up to fix something. But it has been done.

FH: Have you any idea what the early fare was?

TURNER: Basically, it run about two cents a mile and then with a 10% reduction in a round-trip rate.

FH: Where were the passengers picked up and deposited?

TURNER: You could pick them up . . . of course, we had a station in every town, but then you would pick them up anywhere they flagged you down. You'd pick them up if it was a crossroad, in front of their house, or anyplace they flagged you down, you would pick them up.

FH: Did you have regular passengers that had some kind of a sign they hung out or you'd just automatically stop for?

TURNER: No. They had to . . . if the driver didn't know them, you had to be flagged down. They had to make a motion with their hand that they wanted to stop you. 'Course you weren't traveling 65, 70 miles an hour like they do today, at least before the 55-mile-an-hour speed limit went in.

FH: On the early cars they had to change tires frequently and patch innertubes. Did they have to do this?

TURNER: They changed tires. I don't think they patched any innertubes. They carried a couple . . . carried two spares, but they would have to change their own tires if they had a flat. 'Course if they were in a town and it happened they could get help that way, they would get it. But otherwise, they had to change it themselves.

FH: What about gasoline? Did they fill it up with enough gasoline when they left here to make the round trip?

TURNER: Oh, yes. They carried enough gasoline for a round trip.

FH: The early cars, didn't they have to buy the gasoline in a hardware store?

TURNER: Well, no, we didn't. They might have -- the cars -- but the buses didn't have to. Oh, you would if something happened because you run out. If you broke a gasoline line, you'd buy it wherever you could get it.

FH: Well, now, you said what the early buses were -- Reos and something else. Now, how did they change over the years?

TURNER: Well, let's . . .

FH: I mean the early ones. Did they change to different makes, and did they carry more passengers?



TURNER: Yes, they got . . . as the years went by, they got to be bigger and better buses. The early ones, they even had side curtains on them and removable window glass in the wintertime . . . to put in in the wintertime. And in the summertime you removed them and then carried side curtains.

FH: What makes were purchased then, do you remember 'way back?

TURNER: Studebaker and White and some General Motors. Yellow coaches they called them in those days.

FH: Well, now, how many passengers did they carry then?

TURNER: They got up to 25 and 29 passengers.

FH: Now, this was while you still had the routes and your father was still in business.

TURNER: Right. Yes, uh huh.

FH: Now, when the jitneys started to run in the mid-1930s with the streetcars and interurbans, did this make a difference in your business?

TURNER: No, we had nothing to do with city buses, city transportation.

FH: So then when they stopped running, that still didn't have any effect?

TURNER: Not on the city operations, no. It had no effect on us at all. Now, the interurbans, when they were running . . . when they shut them off -- and I don't even know the exact time, but it was in the early 'thirties -- my dad put on extra buses to Sullivan the day that they shut off the interurbans. But they weren't needed, so it wasn't long pulling them off of the highway, the extra trips.

FH: Well, did your business expand . . . was that the only expansion or did you expand to other places when the interurbans stopped?

TURNER: No. We didn't expand to any other places. That was in depression times and people just weren't going anyplace. So we didn't do any expanding at all.

FH: In World War II, this made a complete change in your business, didn't it?

TURNER: Yes, it did.

FH: How?

TURNER: Well, we had to have more buses coming in to take care of workers, and then we expanded into different towns out of Terre Haute here.

FH: Was that for the defense plants here? Did you have special buses that went just to the North Wabash River Ordnance Works and South Vigo Ordnance Works defense plants?

TURNER: We had one going to the North plant but not to the South one, 'cause there was another bus company taking care of that one.

FH: Where were these defense plants?

TURNER: Well, there was one south of Terre Haute at . . . oh, it was about nine miles south on U.S. 41, and the other one was up at Newport, Indiana, or Dana.

FH: When the war was over, did that again change your business?

TURNER: For the first three or four years we expanded to different cities and towns out in the area. But it was ceased after about five years of operation.

FH: When was the most expansion in your business while it was still operating with routes?

TURNER: Well, after World War II between, oh, around 1947 and '48.

FH: Your office and garage are now at 447 North 9th Street. In what other locations have they been?

TURNER: Well, we used to be up at Twelve Points area in a garage up there. And then, previous to that during World War II we were on the corner of 5th and Cherry Street.

FH: Was that where your father started the business?

TURNER: No. He started the business at his home up in Twelve Points area.

FH: Was your father a Terre Haute . . .

TURNER: Not originally. He was born north of Terre Haute, but he came up here as a young man when he first got married.

FH: What did he do before he started the bus?

TURNER: He worked as a secretary for Shirkie Coal Company of Clinton. And then he and his brother, after that, started up in the coal business in Terre Haute, previous to his getting in the bus business.

FH: Did he get in the bus business because the coal mines were beginning to shut down then?

TURNER: Well, I don't know. He probably saw the need for the buses, and he and his brother were running the coal business.

FH: His brother did not go in with him on the buses?

TURNER: No. He didn't. No.

FH: When did your routes stop and you become a charter company?

TURNER: Well, I'm gonna have to do a little guessing there. About the last scheduled run we had was about 11 years ago -- 11 or 12 [1969 or 1970]. [It] just got so there were too many cars to compete with the buses.

FH: And the business started . . .

TURNER: Business fell off and kept dropping off. About 9 years ago [1972], I guess it was, instead of 11, the last time we had a scheduled run.

FH: And how many buses did you have at that time?

TURNER: Well, at one time we had around 16 buses. Of course, we were running a lot of scheduled service at the time.

FH: Were those as big as the buses you have now?

TURNER: No. They weren't as big, accordingly.

FH: What were the fares to surrounding towns, and what towns did you service when you discontinued the routes?

TURNER: Well, we were servicing between Terre Haute and Clinton which was the last one we took off. And we run lines to Paris, Illinois, and Robinson, Illinois, and to Casey, Illinois. And we used to run to Sullivan by way of Graysville. And then we had the Lafayette run -- from Terre Haute to Lafayette -- and from Terre Haute to Fontanet . . . to Burnett and Fontanet.

FH: Did you ever cover St. Mary's?

TURNER: Yes. I forgot that one. We had the St. Mary's line, and we also had . . . for a couple . . . oh, a year or maybe two years -- I don't remember how long -- we run 13 trips a day from Terre Haute out to Spelterville, which is up on North 13th Street.

FH: What was at Spelterville?

TURNER: Just local service. No plant up there, just local service, population.

FH: I suppose consistently you increased fares. When was the biggest jump other than recently, probably?

TURNER: Probably . . . I'm just afraid to say because it held at 2¢ a mile for years, and then we . . . I'm gonna say in the last seven or eight years there's been the big jump in it.

FH: Both when you had routes and now on the charter service, you figure the fare by the load and per mile?

TURNER: Yes. On the charter service, it's figured so much for the bus. It's not our responsibility to fill the bus. The chartering party charts the bus, and they fill it. Whether they want to put it full or half-full, it still costs the same money.

FH: Have you always had to have a permit to operate?

TURNER: Well, with the exception of the first few years in the early 'twenties . . . I don't know when they come up with the Interstate Commerce Commission, but it was probably in the . . . about 1930, I expect, along in there.

FH: From where does that come -- your permit?

TURNER: From both the state and the federal government. You get a state permit as well as an interstate permit.

FH: What are those called?

TURNER: Well, they're just called "permits." One of them is what they call the "ICC permit," which is the interstate. And the other one for Indiana we call the "PSCI permit," which is Public Service Commission of Indiana.

FH: You have to get these annually?

TURNER: No. When you get them, they're yours as long as you operate them.

FH: And if you add a bus, does that change your permit?

TURNER: No, it doesn't change your permit, but you do have to file with the commission to add a schedule if you're running a scheduled run, but not just the buses.

FH: If you go from six to eight buses, you don't have to notify them?

TURNER: No. That has no bearing on it.

FH: Do you have to be notified if a permit's been given to another company?

TURNER: Yes. If another company applies for one, anyone that it has any effect on -- why, the possible competition -- would have to be notified that they're going to have a hearing on it.

FH: Well, now, when you take the trips now, what do you do if a bus breaks down?

- TURNER: We get help from the nearest bus line wherever we're at. If we're within four, five or six hours of our own home garage, why we'll get a bus of our own, especially if it can't be fixed real quick.
- FH: Come down and transfer your passengers?
- TURNER: Right. That's right.
- FH: Now, when you have more than one bus, you try to keep them close together just for this reason, don't you?
- TURNER: Well, we want to run them together, yes.
- FH: What kind of insurance must you carry?
- TURNER: Well, the federal government requires you to keep half a million, but we carry more than that of public liability insurance.
- FH: Besides the insurance on the bus itself?
- TURNER: Yes. Well, that's right.
- FH: What are the driver requirements?
- TURNER: Well, they just have to pass the public passenger . . . for a passenger license -- public passenger license.
- FH: Now, you do hire some other drivers because you now have how many buses?
- TURNER: We have eight -- seven buses now. We usually try to keep eight, but right now we only have seven.
- FH: So you have extra drivers and auxiliary drivers?
- TURNER: Right. That's right. We have extra men that hold down other jobs and are moonlighting, as they call it, and work for us on their days off.
- FH: Now, besides having to have their passenger license, do you give them some sort of an examination or do you require certain things from them?
- TURNER: Well, yes. We require . . . we like to see a fellow that's got a good habit going for him. We won't hire a man that we know has got bad eyes or

TURNER: if he's a drinking man. And his personality goes a long ways with it.

FH: Where are most of your trips now?

TURNER: Well, most of them are one-day trips like Chicago, St. Louis, Cincinnati, Indianapolis . . .

FH: But you do have trips like to Florida and the East Coast?

TURNER: Oh, yes. We run charters to Florida, the East Coast, Washington, D.C., up in the Dakotas, Colorado . . .

FH: Now, are these set up by the persons who charter your bus or do you set them up?

TURNER: No, we will help a group set them up, but they . . . we just charter the buses for them. Any tours have to be taken care of through a tour company, so . . .

FH: You don't set up any tours yourself?

TURNER: Not individual tours, no. But we will set them up for a group.

FH: Oh, I see.

TURNER: For a certain group of people . . . for example, if AARP /American Association of Retired Persons/ wants us to set them up a trip, we will set them up one.

FH: But you will not set up a trip and then solicit passengers?

TURNER: No. We don't do that.

FH: Who is your best customer?

TURNER: Well, that . . . of course, we've got three or four colleges in the area here -- Indiana State, Rose-Hulman, St. Mary-of-the-Woods. And we do get work out of Wabash College at Crawfordsville and DePauw at Greencastle.

FH: Well, then your customers are not only Terre Haute people?

TURNER: That's right. We cover the Wabash Valley area pretty much.

FH: Who else do you serve besides these colleges?

TURNER: Well, different clubs, fraternal organizations, and the senior citizens club, AARP, and the high schools in the area -- the whole Wabash Valley area.

FH: The YWCA?

TURNER: Yes, the YWCA, of course.

FH: Don't you have some trips for the Sycamore Club?

TURNER: Well, that comes under your fraternal . . . I call them fraternal clubs.

FH: Don't you have an interesting trip every year down to the race track at Henderson, Kentucky?

TURNER: Oh, yes. Yes. That's the Sycamore Club goes down there. And then we have other clubs that go down there, too.

FH: And do you set up so that they -- not you, but they -- can serve refreshments on the bus?

TURNER: Yes, they do that. (laughs)

FH: Now, the schools are using their own school corporation buses more I think, aren't they?

TURNER: That's right.

FH: That affects your business, I expect?

TURNER: That's right. They take my tax money to buy buses and then try to put me out of business with their own buses.

FH: Now, your father left the business to his wife and you children.

TURNER: Right.

FH: And you have now made an agreement, I understand, so that the business will stay in the family?

TURNER: That's right. It's a closed corporation.



FH: Now, one of your brothers died, didn't he?

TURNER: Yes. That was Hubert. Hubert died.

FH: When did he die, do you remember?

TURNER: I believe in 1968 [was] when he died.

FH: You're the oldest and partially retired, and you're now spending the winters in Florida?

TURNER: Yes, that's right. I have to on account of my health. To get out of the cold air.

FH: But you still come back and drive in the summer time?

TURNER: Right. I still drive a bus in the summer time.

FH: That's when most of your trips are anyhow.

TURNER: That's when we need the extra men, yes.

FH: Are any others near retirement?

TURNER: No, other than Josephine in the office. She would like to retire. But the other two brothers are not old enough.

FH: Can you get along without Josephine?

TURNER: That'd be kinda hard.

FH: How many young people are there in the family to carry on?

TURNER: Well, we have one nephew now. My brother Bob, his boy is in with us now. So that makes a third generation.

FH: But he is interested in staying in the business.

TURNER: That's right. He's interested in it.

FH: What do you do for mechanics? You have your own mechanics, don't you?

TURNER: Oh, yes, we have our own mechanics. My mechanic right now is my cousin, and my nephew is breaking in as a mechanic.

FH: This nephew that you just mentioned?

TURNER: Right. Uh huh.

FH: Has it always been members of the family who've been mechanics?

TURNER: Yes. For years it's been that way.

FH: Your brothers or some of your cousins?

TURNER: One of my brothers or even myself or my cousin is in there helping. Or maybe I should say we're helping my cousin do the mechanical work.

FH: What was the price of gas and oil in the early days, do you remember?

TURNER: Oh, in the early days, probably 10¢ a gallon. When I started in 1935, I bought many a gallon for 8 gallon for a dollar.

FH: And now it's . . . ?

TURNER: And now it's . . . I think our last tank that we paid . . . paid close to tax and all, about \$1.15 a gallon.

FH: Do you get . . . do you have any kind of agreement where you can get gasoline at a slightly reduced price because you use so much?

TURNER: Well, no. We have our own tanks. We do buy by the tank in our garage. So we get it a little cheaper. We buy it wholesale which is three or four cents under filling station price.

FH: Can you always make your own repairs?

TURNER: Oh, yes. We do all of our own repair work.

FH: Now, how much has the energy shortage and the price of gasoline affected your business?

TURNER: Well, I can't . . . I don't know if it's affected it any or not. If it has, it's come in the form of when we lost the business due to the economy, we might pick up something else that the energy was causing. But we still can't see where the difference is.

FH: But it has made you increase your charge?

TURNER: Oh, yes. We've had to increase our charge due to the higher cost of everything.

FH: When did the city, state, and federal government begin to regulate transportation?

TURNER: I would be guessing on that, but I'm gonna say it was around . . . in the early 'thirties.

FH: How did they do it?

TURNER: When they come up with the permits, you had to have a permit to run it. Any one of us already operating, they automatically gave you the permit, and that was called . . . you were operating under what they called the old "grandfather clause" then. Because you were operating previous to the Commission being formed.

FH: Did that affect your business in any way?

TURNER: No. That affected it in no way at all.

FH: Do you have to conform to load limits?

TURNER: Oh, yes. Sure. You can only have so many seats on the bus. You're not allowed to have but a certain number of people standing. Of course, we don't let anybody stand. In some states, you have a limit on the standees.

FH: What are your safety standards? Just that?

TURNER: Well, that would be hard to say on this because we're subject to state and federal inspection at any time. We never know when.

FH: What are your rules for passengers other than no standing?

TURNER: Well, we don't like for them to be standing up when the bus is in motion. And, of course, we don't allow any scuffling on the bus or anything of that type.

FH: What about smoking?

- TURNER: Well, so far on scheduled runs, the government has put a stop to it only except in the back end of the bus. But now on charters I don't know what the regulation is. If a club can set up their own regulation, they charter a bus for the individual group.
- FH: You do usually request that smokers sit on the back of the bus though, don't you?
- TURNER: I do, yes.
- FH: Now what are the rules for the drivers?
- TURNER: Well, you mean like for smoking or . . . ?
- FH: Well, I mean you apparently set some kind of rules like if they're in trouble or somebody gets ill on the bus?
- TURNER: Well, you just kinda have to let the driver use his better judgment and take care of the situation if he can. If it's something that's clear out of hand, he goes to the next town and calls the police. If something gets clear out of line, he don't even handle it himself. He just has the police take care of it.
- FH: I doubt if you have much trouble like that.
- TURNER: No. We don't . . . very little trouble like that.
- FH: You pretty well screen your charter groups, don't you?
- TURNER: Well, yes. If we have problems with . . . too bad a problem with a group, we just won't haul them.
- FH: Do you have any especially memorable trips -- either funny or serious or . . . ?
- TURNER: Oh, yes. They've all got their highlights and that type of thing. But I just . . . to say which one it would be, I wouldn't want to say.
- FH: Well, tell us some of the funny things.
- TURNER: Well, I wouldn't . . . I've had . . . I've been driving a bus since 1935. And I have had everything

TURNER: but childbirth to happen to me. And I've come mighty close to that twice.

FH: (laughs) What did you do?

TURNER: (laughs) I took the people -- the lady to the hospital! (more laughter)

FH: You re-routed the bus.

TURNER: I re-routed the bus and got her to a hospital.

FH: Have you had any especially famous passengers?

TURNER: Well, I probably have but I just right now . . . I can't name any of 'em real quick.

FH: Race drivers?

TURNER: Oh, I probably have had a lot of race drivers on. I've had Firestone family on the bus, riding a scheduled bus once. We've had a lot of entertainers come into town . . .

FH: Phil Harris?

TURNER: Phil Harris and, oh, I can't even think of the names of them right now.

FH: Any special incidents that you can think of that are . . .

TURNER: No. It'd be too numerous to mention.

FH: What do you see as the future of the company?

TURNER: Well . . .

FH: Because of the present energy situation and so on?

TURNER: We don't think it's gonna get any worse, but it's like everything else. If you're just selling popcorn and peanuts, you can price yourself out of business. If the prices get too high, the people won't go.

FH: What difference is there in the passenger you used to have and the ones you have now?

TURNER: Well, we're in strictly charter business now, where before we had scheduled runs. And you had to take anybody unless . . . if he was clear out of line, you wouldn't let him on the bus. You didn't haul a person that was intoxicated on the bus. Once in a while one would slip up on you and get on, but you'd feel sorry for him and try to get him home. And every time you done that, you just got yourself in trouble.

FH: Now, you're been in the charter business nine years, and in that time you've carried many different types of passengers. Do you find the children who ride now on trips more unruly than they used to be or better?

TURNER: Oh, I think that all . . . they're about the same as they've always been. 'Course the ones going on the charter, you're getting the better end of the class anyway.

FH: They usually have an adult with them anyway?

TURNER: Oh, yes, they have a teacher and adults with them.

FH: What major changes have you seen in Terre Haute and in the transportation picture over these years?

TURNER: Well, I can recall back in . . . after World War II was over with, from 3:30 in the afternoon to 5:30 in the afternoon you just could pull a bus up to that bus station and just holler this bus is going anywhere, and there was a busload of people going home. But now there isn't even one commuter bus goes out of Terre Haute. So it was a commuter line . . . a community then. All the buses going out to all the outlying areas. But now you have none of that. It's strictly through buses.

FH: What changes have you seen in Terre Haute that are good or bad?

TURNER: Well, I'm like everybody else. The town is moving out in the county, and downtown is kinda disappearing.

FH: Do you think it's the people's fault or the merchants' fault?

TURNER: Well, I don't know. I wouldn't want to say whose . . . if I knew why, I'd have a good answer. But I don't know why it is. But it's just like it's just a matter of they moved out in the county, and they may have to move back in town before it's over with if this gasoline gets so high.

FH: How do you feel about Terre Haute which has always been your home? Would you want to live anyplace else?

TURNER: Well, I always say my daddy raised me to say, "If you couldn't say anything good about your hometown, just keep your mouth shut." So, Terre Haute's my hometown.

FH: You've never been sorry you stayed here?

TURNER: No, ma'am. Never been sorry of it.

FH: Do you want to tell us anything else interesting about the bus business?

TURNER: No. I think that pretty well takes care of it. We're still gonna be in business here as the Turner family for a long while I hope.

FH: That's a bit unusual to have one family stay in business and so many of the members of the family enter it, isn't it?

TURNER: Yes, it is. We've been born together and raised and stayed in business together all our lives.

FH: You have your ups and downs but pretty well you get along?

TURNER: That's right. Yes.

FH: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Turner.

END OF SIDE 1

DN:           While you were talking, Ray, you never did mention the kind of clientele that you had when you first began. You just picked up anyone that was standing along the road? Did you advertise? You went outside of town, right?

TURNER:       Yes. Oh, yes.

DN:           Okay. How did these people know you were coming? Are these people who you were taking to other towns or were they gonna come back to Terre Haute?

TURNER:       Well, those were people that were, maybe, in Marshall coming to Terre Haute to shop.

DN:           Did many work here?

TURNER:       Oh, yes. In the mornings you had trips coming into Terre Haute here that were going to work -- the workers.

DN:           What kind of workers?

TURNER:       Well, they were clerks in the stores, mostly; there were some factory workers, but mostly they were clerical workers.

DN:           Now, did you bring them just into downtown or did you take them out to the factories?

TURNER:       No. We'd just bring them in to the bus station. We would let them off on the way to the bus station, if they wanted off. And then we would pick them up at the bus station in the evening.

DN:           Now, was this all year round or was this seasonal?

TURNER:       No, that was all year round.

DN:           All year round.

TURNER:       We used to carry a lot of Indiana State University students, too.

DN:           That would come in to college.

TURNER:       They rode on a weekly trip.



DN:           Okay. While people were coming in to work, then you'd be heavy in the morning and in the evening when you're taking them home . . . picking them up and taking them home . . . .

TURNER:       Yes.

DN:           Would you have your schedule set up so that you ran every hour, every half hour, or . . .

TURNER:       Well, like for St. Mary of the Woods, it was hourly service; and Clinton, it was an hourly service up there. And in the evenings it would be about every 15 minutes.

DN:           Now, I notice you mentioned that Marshall was the first place you started a route to.

TURNER:       Right.

DN:           Did people from Marshall tend to come in here to work? Was this it?

TURNER:       Well, at that time it wasn't so much workers. It was just getting people into Terre Haute.

DN:           To shop?

TURNER:       To shop and bring their . . . a lot of them would bring their farm goods in -- their eggs and milk and butter. They'd come in bringing them in baskets.

DN:           Where did you store this? Did you have storage space?

TURNER:       Well, they had to hold it on their lap.

DN:           You had no storage space like you do now on buses?

TURNER:       No. Not . . . it was all outside. Buses had running boards. Back then, too, if the bus was full, the driver would take your ticket and if you were a man, you'd ride the runnin' board.

DN:           Oh, really? Wasn't it cold?

TURNER: Well. It'd be in the summer time. And then if you'd fall off, the driver would stop and let you get back on. Then the next week, if you went to ride and the bus was full and you'd say, "All right. Here, Ray, is my ticket; I'll ride the running board again." I'd say, "No. You can't ride the running board no more 'cause you can't hold on!" (laughter)

DN: Weren't you afraid they'd sue you?

TURNER: Oh, they didn't know what that word was then!

DN: They didn't know?

TURNER: No.

DN: And no problems with this?

TURNER: No. That was a privilege to get to ride on the running board. Because the bus was full, and they still wanted to get to town.

FH: That was along both sides of the bus?

TURNER: No, just on . . . mostly on the right side they done that.

FH: Well, on the original buses you didn't get in from the front and walk back an aisle, you got in. from the side, didn't you?

TURNER: Yes. From the right side of the bus. The doors were down the right side of the bus.

DN: You just got into the aisle . . . onto the bus in the aisle you were sitting in, then?

TURNER: Well, you're sitting in a row. Just like . . . in rows. There was a door to each row.

DN: Right.

FH: How many people to a row? Three?

TURNER: Four. Maybe five. Depended on how little you were.

DN: Did you have an aisle down the middle?

TURNER: On, no. No. No aisle.

DN: There were just four across?

TURNER: Four straight rows across, five. Some of them later on had six or seven rows.

DN: Did you allow animals or anything like that on the buses?

TURNER: No. No. Oh, years ago, they'd haul a dog . . . bring a dog with them, but not any more.

FH: But the aisle was down one side?

TURNER: There was no aisle to it.

DN: No aisle to it, getting on each row.

TURNER: Yes. I guess I should have brought that picture of that ol' bus out there and let you see it.

MEISTER: I brought it last time.

FH: There was a door for each row of seats?

TURNER: Each row of seats, that's right. Um hm.

DN: And they brought their goods on their laps -- that they were going to sell in town.

TURNER: Yes. If they carried a basket in, maybe they might . . . Here's some lady who might have a basket on her arm. She might have that thing full of three or four pounds of butter and a bunch of eggs in there.

DN: Now, would people then . . . when you picked them up, they had to have their own city buses to take them to your bus line to bring them into town? Or were you winding around enough that you could pick them up?

TURNER: Well, they'd flag you down going through town. Through Marshall, for example -- Marshall, Illinois -- you didn't pick them all up at the bus station. You'd pick them all the way in and out of town and let them off.

DN:           Okay. Would you be picking people up then as you're heading into Marshall and then they would ride all the way in and turn around and come back with you?

TURNER:       No. You'd be on the way back out.

DN:           On the way back out?

TURNER:       Right.

FH:           You went the same route every time.

TURNER:       Oh, yes. You had a set route through every town that you went through.

DN:           Terre Haute was more or less a shopping center and work center than all of the neighboring . . .

MEISTER:      Doctors . . .

TURNER:       Yes. Uh huh.

DN:           . . . people were coming in to . . .

TURNER:       Oh, yes.

FH:           Actually, it still is.

TURNER:       Um hm.

DN:           Well, he was saying that once the interurbans stopped that you didn't have the people coming in any more, so evidently people stopped coming into Terre Haute except for by cars.

TURNER:       Well, no. It . . . a better example of it . . . when we started up to Burnett, Fontanet, right after World War II, half of the houses up there didn't even have a driveway to them! And then about three or four years after the war was over, every yard was full of automobiles. So that meant that they weren't riding buses any more. They were driving their own cars.

FH:           Did you have your own bus station or did you share the bus station with Greyhound and other buses?

TURNER: Oh, we shared the bus station -- the Union Bus Station as they called it.

FH: Did you say at one time it was at 6th and Cherry?

TURNER: Right. It was at 6th and Cherry for years.

FH: Wasn't that the old Baptist Church?

TURNER: I don't know.

FH: It was an old red brick building back of the Filbeck Hotel, wasn't it?

TURNER: It was right on the corner of 6th and Cherry, catty-corner across from the Deming Hotel. And previous to that it was between 7th and 8th Street on Ohio. That's getting back there several years.

FH: Um hm.

DN: What kind of mileage did you get on your buses then and now?

TURNER: Oh, you'd . . . the mileage was about the same.

DN: Is it really?

TURNER: But you didn't have as big a bus either then. I'd say they got six or seven mile to a gallon of gas then on a bus. And then your buses got bigger on the gasoline engines; the mileage got less. Then when they went to diesel, why it picked up then.

FH: When automobiles started, they were pretty expensive according to the economy then.

TURNER: Oh, yes.

FH: And I presume the buses were, too.

TURNER: Yes, they were. For the economy they were just as expensive, I guess, accordingly as they are today. A new bus right today costs around \$140,000, but that's a 47-passenger. Where back in . . . oh, right after the war, we bought a 28-passenger bus -- <sup>a</sup> new one. You could buy a new one for about \$8,000 or \$9,000. But it only seated 28 people. So I guess,

TURNER: accordingly, they were just as high then as they are today for what a dollar would buy.

For example, a tire . . . back 20 years ago you could buy a tire for one of our buses for \$80 or \$85, and now they cost \$350. So everything has . . . the economy just keeps on cuttin' down on the value of the dollar, so I guess it was about the same then as it is now. You worked for \$15 a week then, and now if you don't pay \$300 a week, they won't even look at you.

DN: Has the clientele changed a great deal in that . . . . Do people traveling now have, oh, more money, that they need to have more money to travel? I think I should say before you started chartering, could you see a difference in the kind of clientele you were having?

TURNER: Well, on local bus lines, no. It was the amount of the clientele. There weren't that many of them riding. But now on your through buses like Greyhound and Trailways, I expect our clientele is about the same now as it was as far as the type as it was then.

DN: Did you have many transient type people that would get on?

TURNER: Oh, years ago, we did, yes. Salesmen would ride regularly. You knew when to expect a salesman in a certain area. And you knew when you expected him. And there were people that come through that would get caught in Terre Haute and have to go spend a night in a hotel before they'd get out on the next day to a bus someplace else.

FH: Did you have books of tickets for a reduced rate for regular passengers?

TURNER: Oh, yes. What we called weekly rate tickets or ten-ride tickets. [The] thing that keeps popping in my mind is in Marshall. We used to haul them for \$2.25 a week and haul them all week long. Twelve rides between Terre Haute and Marshall. And now I think it must be two dollars one way to ride a Greyhound from Terre Haute to Marshall.

DN: Did you have more men, or women, traveling or about the same? You know, men came in to work. Did women come in to work or shop or . . .

TURNER: Oh, yes. Women came in to work. Yes, we had a lot . . . quite a few women come into work, and a lot of girls going to college rode on commuter tickets.

DN: Did people let their children travel by themselves at that time? I know nowadays you see a lot of times a child being put on a plane or whatever by themselves and . . . Did they do that 'way back then?

TURNER: Well, it has been done, but not too frequently.

DN: Was there more family traveling together than now?

TURNER: No. No, not that much.

FH: They didn't really travel for pleasure, did they?

TURNER: No. They didn't really travel for pleasure too much. Once in a while in the summer months you'd catch a man and his wife, maybe one child, was going on vacation traveling by bus all the way, but . . .

DN: I was thinking we had vaudeville shows and things here, and I was wondering if people were coming in in the evening.

TURNER: Well, unless it was Saturday evening, why they wouldn't travel by bus 'cause there wouldn't be a trip late enough to get them back.

DN: Did you haul many people that were, you know, in theater or baseball teams or things like that?

TURNER: Oh, yes. We used to haul the old Terre Haute Three-I ball club and the Paris ball club, when they were playing professional ball. But that's about the limit of it.

MEISTER: Only thing else would be when they come in by plane to play here -- to pick up.

TURNER: Oh, yes. Today. Yes. A visiting football team or basketball team comes in town -- into Terre Haute -- if they come by airplane, why they'll call us to come and get them and bring them into the hotel, and to transport them back and forth to the stadium or wherever they're playing ball or whatever they might be doing.

DN: I know nowadays sometimes when you get off buses, it's all filthy with paper and cigarettes and so forth. Did you have trouble with chewing tobacco and all that junk back then?

TURNER: Oh, you're back in schedule. When we were running schedule, the kids would get on the bus, especially, and write all over the seats and cut them up.

DN: You still had that kind of problem?

TURNER: Oh, yes. Back about 30 years ago they did that. I'm talking about the regular schedules. Now, charters you don't have that problem.

MEISTER: Except for the drunks.

TURNER: Yes. (laughs)

DN: (laughs)

During the war, did you haul soldiers or sailors or anything like that?

TURNER: Well, yes. There was always military traveling and their wives traveling, going someplace and riding our bus part of the way and then get on another bus.

FH: People who came in here from small towns to catch the train came by bus, didn't they?

TURNER: Well, yes. Of course, back then, too, the trains were going through the towns, too, but they might come in from . . . ride our bus in or they could get in at . . . make a better connection than they could going by the train to get to Terre Haute.

DN: So, actually your bus route filled in places where other forms of transportation could not get to?



TURNER: That's right. Yes.

DN: . . . A more personal type service?

TURNER: Yes. Uh huh.

Of course, then the bus . . . then the automobile . . . as soon as the automobiles got more plentiful, then the bus business started dropping off -- after World War II.

DN: Do you think there was anything that could have changed that . . . that could have kept the people riding buses or was it because they didn't like the inconvenience of waiting for half an hour or were buses late?

TURNER: No. It wasn't because they were late. They just didn't like . . . they wanted a more . . . to be more convenient. And so they'd drive their own car. And it's got to a point now where people won't even ride with their neighbor if they have to go five minutes early.

DN: I agree with that.

FH: A lot of your business now is senior citizens because they don't drive any more, isn't it?

TURNER: That's right. Yes. A lot of our business is senior citizen work where 20 years ago we weren't getting anything like that. In charter work.

DN: I gather when you first started your family actually did all the mechanics and the mechanical work and everything all the way down the line?

TURNER: Well, yes. Of course, my dad hired a hired mechanic, but then he was a mechanic, too. And he done a lot of the work and the book work and everything else.

DN: What kind of skills did you look for in your first drivers? You know, you didn't have to have any driver's license or anything, and here you were putting someone in that driver's seat to drive a group of people around and you never know who you're getting on that bus. Did you look for patience?  
(laughs)

TURNER: No. Well, you . . . if he doesn't know how to drive, you teach him to drive before you turn him lose. And a lot of times you can take a fellow that didn't know how to drive, teach him to drive your way, and you don't have to break him of any bad habits if he happened to be driving for somebody else.

You had to teach him to drive. We didn't have what you call a regular school, but we taught him to drive before he was ever turned lose with a bus.

DN: How did you decide on your routes? I know you went to Marshall but how did you decide which roads to go down? Did you look for the most houses or . . .

TURNER: Well, [we looked for] the most population and [tried to] pick out a road that went through the most towns and hope that you was making a right move. Of course, we started up to Lafayette once -- when was that? Right after World War II we started to Lafayette up through Crawfordsville, and we extended our Crawfordsville line on up to Lafayette. And we lost a pile of money real quick.

DN: Not enough people.

TURNER: No.

FH: Most people in the early days didn't travel by bus for pleasure at all. It was strictly business, wasn't it?

TURNER: Yes. That's right.

FH: Or shopping?

TURNER: Yes. They were going someplace. They weren't just route riding.

DN: It fascinates me to see this car full of people with eggs and milk and cheese and whatnot, you know, going to trade. (laughs) You don't see that nowadays.

TURNER: My dad, for years he wouldn't take a scheduled . . . a certain scheduled trip off. Nobody [was] riding it! But ol' Joe out here at the state line, he's gotta go in to Marshall or in to the county seat to pick up his check -- his county check -- once a month,

TURNER: or go in to cash it and get his groceries. And my dad would leave that schedule on there until he went broke!

DN: So that the man could make it in.

TURNER: So that man could make it . . . if there was only one guy who rode once a month . . .

MEISTER: And if he didn't have any money, he went anyway.

TURNER: Yes. And if he didn't have any money, he rode the bus anyhow.

DN: Very personalized. Where you knew your customers and . . .

MEISTER: We had one driver when we tried going to Rockville -- up through Rosedale -- during the summer when they'd have Bible school . . . there was a family of kids. They couldn't afford the bus fare for them kids, and ol' Herb, he felt like them kids needed to go to Bible school. So he took them! Didn't get any money, but we took them. (laughs)

DN: Nowadays you don't have that where you know the names of the person getting on your bus.

FH: They don't have that personal service, but I've had some experience with the Turners, and I think they always retain a personal interest in their passengers and in the lives of their drivers outside the family.

TURNER: We like to think that we do that -- still give that personal touch to it. Because we want the customer to be satisfied and want them to have a good trip, and we want them to come back and call us when they get ready to go again.

MEISTER: And I will say, most of our drivers, they take care of their business . . . our business like it was their own.

TURNER: Yes.

FH: You probably treat them like your own, too. I saw one instance of that on a trip, I know that. But it was down at Santa Claus.

RAYMOND K. TURNER  
Tape 1-Side 2

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MEISTER: Oh! (chuckles)

TURNER: Yes.

END OF SIDE 2

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